

BACKGROUND FOR CATECHISTS

Know Your Audience

Just like Jesus, every good catechist knows their audience.

“The catechist – must take into consideration all the human factors of a particular age level in order to present the Gospel message in a vital and compelling way.” (NDC #48)

Who Are Your Sixth Graders?

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- ❖ Continue to grow in their relationship with God through prayer. Can take greater roles of responsibility in prayer and worship.
- ❖ View all events in their lives as part of faith.
- ❖ Understand symbols, stories, and religious images of God in a way that can be somewhat literal.
- ❖ Need help to develop their own unique God-given gifts.
- ❖ Catch the tradition of the past through stories (scripture, Jesus, stories of the Church). Can identify outstanding role models of the present.
- ❖ Begin to glimpse themselves in the future through observing the virtues and character of heroes and heroines and mature adults.
- ❖ Respond to lived faith witness by willingness to participate in more systematic presentation of the faith, liturgy, and religious practices.
- ❖ Need help to see the reasons behind Church rules, privileges, and responsibilities.
- ❖ Need help to understand that God desires the good and happiness of everyone.
- ❖ Vest greater importance in their expanding world of school, community, people, and events around the world (the latter brought closer through media).
- ❖ Can be introduced to care for the aged, persons with disabilities, the poor in the neighborhood and the world, through their expanded involvement with others outside the home.
- ❖ Gain a sense of responsibility and develop care for others by being involved in charitable collections, community clean ups, and other organized events.
- ❖ Begin to have a genuine sense of fairness and equality.
- ❖ Can take others' views into account in bargaining to meet their own needs.
- ❖ Grow in the ability to understand abstract qualities in the future such as justice and injustice by participating now in activities with sharp contrasts between good and evil.

Grade 6 Catechists

Guiding Principles

Catechists can:

- Provide reasonable explanations and increased group activities because the children have developed a longer attention span. Augment the docility and the unquestioning acceptance of adult explanations by capitalizing on the children's interest in sharing in small group discussions.
- Foster opportunities to replace interest in fantasy and fairy tale by interest in true-to-life stories that originate in the life of the Church, in their own communities and cultures, as well as in other areas.
- Provide group projects in which all the children can be involved because children learn most effectively when engaged in the learning process.
- Stimulate the children's creativity through music, art, drama, and related activities. Provide an opportunity for them to express and appreciate religious concepts.
- Encourage students to analyze facts and to explore the lived faith of believers, past and present, whose lives they can emulate.
- Continue to offer opportunities for meaningful memorization, particularly of certain essential doctrinal statements.
- Use daily situations and discussions to help students develop skills in moral decision making. Challenge the students to correlate what they say they believe with their actions. Encourage them to do what is right because it is right, whether it pleases the group or not. Stress the reasons and the values underlying the rules, as well as the importance of right motives.
- Include the element of social awareness in prayer experiences and reconciliation services. Move away from a simplified following of the rules and help the children to progress toward a faithful response to a call from the Lord. Make children aware of social ills and human need by helping them to become involved in social justice activities in various ways - e.g. recycling bottles and aluminum, learning not to waste natural resources. Teach that all are called to give of their time, talents, and earthly goods.
- Present Jesus as a model and friend. Identify biblical personalities, saints, and people in our own day who are living as Jesus did and who also serve as role models.
- Explore more fully doctrines of the creed, commandments, and sacraments. Emphasize the meaning behind law and ritual. Provide explanations that represent the effectiveness of Christ at work in the world today.

- Realize the fact that sixth graders are more aware of social problems, that they indeed have a strong sense of social justice, which results in their willingness to help others, even at some risk or actual cost to themselves. Lead students in the study of the scriptural history of God's identity with the oppressed and his action to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.
- Provide a safe and secure setting for exploring questions and doubts. Provide a forum for students to explore their feelings, as they try to integrate the reality of their life experience with their religious beliefs.
- Teach young people to pray, keeping in mind that learning to pray is more important than learning prayers. Provide opportunities so that the boys and girls unite themselves to God with spontaneity and joy. Encourage silent prayer, for example, after the narration of a Gospel passage or at unforeseen moments created by nature or by the interaction of the children.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Are in a transitional stage of physical maturation.
- Experience unevenness in every level; e.g. have propensity to be energetic and active at one time, extremely fatigued shortly afterwards.
- Vacillate between high and low moods (physical and/or emotional).
- Can experience the onslaught of puberty.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Regard the influence of parent/teacher as weaker than that of peers.
- Continue to be in transition between adolescence and middle childhood, often feel like they do not belong (between elementary and middle or junior high).
- Need to accept themselves as male or female and to deal with others on those terms; have a growing interest in clothes, although not necessarily how to care for them.
- Can experience negative conditioning and ignorance as primary problems in psychological development.
- Continue to develop close friendships.
- Are developing self-image; allow self-worth to be prominently influenced by peer groups.
- Need significant adults for guidance/support to enable them to make wise decisions about real issues; begin to develop ideas about life's work.
- Dislike being embarrassed or criticized in front of friends, especially by parents; need caring groups (family, friends) for belonging.
- Experience confusion, curiosity, uncertainty, and experimentation in behavior which tends to accompany their search for personal identity.
- Enjoy examining their roots and stories of their families and groups to which they belong as they search for their identity.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Children at this age:

- Can use their minds to a greater degree.
- Tend to be very intellectual; are preoccupied with facts, reasons, and discovery through experimentation.
- Can work effectively with universal and deductive reasoning in arriving at conclusions.
- May still need grounding in concrete objects and situations when dealing with abstract ideas.
- Continue to see details more clearly than main ideas.
- Prefer working with the concrete rather than the abstract.

NOTES

- ❖ Pope John Paul II in **On Catechesis in Our Time** encourages the use of advances in pedagogy; biology, sociology as they help us to model God's Divine Pedagogy (teaching us gradually in stages according to our level of development). The above noted information is consistent with such documents as the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Catechetical Documents of the Church.
- ❖ The above sciences have limitations. While this information does provide references to typical age ranges, children continue to be viewed as individuals and individual differences need to be taken into account.

